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OF ROLES AND GIFTS – BRAZIL'S QUEST FOR A REDEFINED RELATIONSHIP WITH AFRICAN STATES

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Taking office on the 1st of January 2003, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, from the leftist Workers Party, declared that his administration would implement major policy shifts, including a redefinition of focal points of Brazilian foreign policy. Among changes that were to come in the country's international agenda, reconceptualising and strengthening ties with Africa was one of the main objectives¹. These political declarations appeared when the president took off for his first official visit to the continent, accompanied by the members of the government and representatives of the business sector. By the end of his second term in 2010, with thirteen official journeys to the continent and twenty-three countries visited, President Lula became the Brazilian head of state who travelled to Africa many more times than his predecessors put together². The quest for stronger ties with Africa, a part of a broader strategy of international insertion termed by Brazilian policymakers "solidarity diplomacy", required defining Brazil's national role conceptions. The strong focus on development cooperation as the main sphere of mutual relations, manifested through both official discourse and a dynamically growing number of technical cooperation projects, could suggest that Brazil was playing the role of a donor in Africa. Yet, the reconstruction of national imaginaries visible since 2003 – executed by stressing the necessity of an increased national self-esteem, called *auto-estima* in Brazil³, introducing mandatory classes of African culture and history in order to stress its

¹ *Inaugural Address by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva taking office in the National Congress*, Brasília, 1.01.2003 [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos-de-posse/discurso-de-posse-1o-mandato/view> [15.08.2015].

² A list of presidential official trips is available on the website of the Library of the Brazilian Presidency (Biblioteca da Presidência). See: [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes> [15.08.2015].

³ S. Burguess, *Auto-estima in Brazil: The logic of Lula's South-south foreign policy*, "International Journal", Autumn 2005, Vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 1133–1151.

influence on the Brazilian culture – had a defining impact on how Brazil perceived its international roles. This was of particular relevance for the role of a donor, a role criticized by Brazilian diplomats, making claims that Brazil instead of being a donor was a development partner. In order to reconceptualise the role of a donor and adjust it to Brazil's self-identification, the country's policymakers strived to create an image of Brazil as distinctive from other states present in Africa. What is more, they endeavoured to redefine Africa's image as Brazil's partner.

In this paper I would like to address the analytical question about the way Brazil reconceptualises the role of a donor through discursive practices of its leaders. My research is anchored in the analytical framework of role theory, highlighting the important contribution of symbolic interactionism, especially George Herbert Mead's analysis of the construction of the self and the other, made to the development of national role conceptions. Further, Brazil's efforts aimed at the creation of a meaningful relationship with states in Africa, visible in presidential speeches of Lula da Silva and to a lesser degree, his successor and the incumbent Dilma Rousseff, can be better understood while applying gift theory to the analysis of the relationship between Brazil and Africa.

National role conceptions, defined by Kalevi Holsti as

policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems⁴

have been a useful tool in explaining patterns of state behaviour. Until the beginning of the 21st century, internal state determinants, mainly military capacity, demographic and economic indicators, were considered main variables affecting the policymakers' selection of national role conceptions. Since the beginning of this century, research highlights the importance of the realm of ideas and symbols in understanding the formation of national role concepts and state interactions. George Herbert Mead's insights on social interactions, leading to the awareness of others and their impact on the creation of the self, are of particular interest for an analysis of perceptions, role concepts and creation of relationships between role partners.

International Relations scholars familiar with Mead's work applied his observations on the formation of the human subject through the recognition of significant and generalized others⁵ constituting the society, to the level of states and interstate relationships. Symbolic interactionists' findings, such as role taking and role making,

⁴ K. J. Holsti, *National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy*, "International Studies Quarterly", September 2007, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 245–246.

⁵ Significant others are agents of sufficient importance to impact an individual's sense of self whereas generalized others are "the organized community or social group which gives to the individual his unity of self". See: G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1972, p. 154.

as well as role change and its sources further contributed to the understanding of shifts in state policies⁶. If the application of symbolic interactionism to the analysis of interactions among states may cause concern, an argument in favour can be the fact that the American philosopher himself acknowledged such a possibility: “nations, like individuals, can become objects to themselves only as they »see themselves through the eyes of the other«”. Mead used his findings on the individual and society to state-level analysis⁷.

Mead analyses the transgression of human subjectivity through focusing on others – this was the premise for interactions among subjects and participation in society. For communication was only possible if the subject was able to recognize significant and generalized others, identifying oneself in other members of the society. Self-cognition was possible by taking the other’s standpoint:

And only through the taking by individuals of the attitude or attitudes of the generalized other toward themselves is the existence of a universe of discourse, as that system of common or social meanings which thinking presupposes at its context, rendered possible⁸.

The powerful concept presented by Mead was the idea of the self-constituted by the “I” and the “me”. In order for the subject to gain self-conscience, it was necessary to objectify oneself – by becoming an object like other phenomena of the social world:

The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved⁹.

The process of the individual’s objectification possible through the recognition of the alter with its roles and perceptions of the individual, constitutes the “me” part of one’s self. The individual’s ability of identification as an object allows self-reflection and is seen as a process of reception and internal organization of alter’s attitudes towards the individual. The “me” is responsible for the adjustment of an individual’s attitudes in order to make them compatible with images and expectations of others:

⁶ S. Harnisch, *“Dialogue and Emergence: George Herbert Mead’s contribution to Role Theory and his Reconstruction of International Politics*, [in:] *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, eds. H. W. Maull, S. Harnisch, C. Frank, Routledge, London–New York 2011, p. 36.

⁷ G. H. Mead, *The psychological bases for internationalism*, “Survey”, Vol. 33, 1915, p. 604, apud S. Harnisch, op. cit., p. 46.

⁸ G. H. Mead, *Mind...*, p. 156.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 138.

“the »me« is the organized set of attitudes of others which one himself assumes”¹⁰. The importance of society with its others for the formation of the individual shows that Mead was abandoning a Cartesian vision of the subject, one in which the subject was self-sufficient in the process of self-cognition¹¹.

Yet, according to Mead, by interacting with others, not only was the individual constituted by society, but he also had the power to contribute towards society's formation. The individual's impact was possible because of the “I” part of the self, its reactions towards external attitudes and the constant dialogue between the “I” and the “me”. If the “me” was formed by becoming aware of the existence of significant and generalised others with their expectations towards the individual, the “I” was the “individual disposition”: “The »I« reacts to the self, which arises through the taking of the attitudes of others. Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the »me« and we react to it as an »I«”¹². It was an expression of the individual's particularities, being independent of its external images and reflections of oneself. The “I” was the creative and impulsive element of the self, granting the individual its uniqueness and creativity, able to transgress the conformist indications of the “me”. Mead claimed that in many situations the “I” and the “me” would be compatible. However, situations of conflict were also possible if the “I” would not consent to expectations identified in the process of role-taking, as Mead termed the process of the subject's adjustment to external expectations undertaken by the “me”. In cases of conflict, a transformation of the role would be possible.

Role-taking has been further described by Ralph Turner who defined it as “a process of looking at or anticipating another's behaviour by viewing it in the context of a role imputed to that other”¹³. As a definition of one's own behaviour would require determining the expectations of others and one's own expectations regarding the behaviours of others, the process of role-taking was enabling one's own role making. The role assumed by the individual could be conformist – in accordance with others' expectations and their roles. It could also be questioned by the individual's “I”, leading to the quest for a role modification. Turner, similar to Mead, mentioned that the individual had the possibility to manipulate with the images it wished to provide to the others in order to change the way it was being perceived and thus change the others' expectations.

One of the main features of roles acknowledged by researchers studying role theory was reciprocity. Reciprocity indicates that the realisation of a subject's role requires identifying a social partner and the way the partner realises his role. It means also that both sides of the relationship have not only rights, but also obligations towards others. Due to different statuses which partners of the role may occupy,

¹⁰ G. H. Mead, *Mind...*, p. 175.

¹¹ S. Harnisch, op. cit., p. 42.

¹² G. H. Mead, *Mind...*, p. 174.

¹³ R. Turner, *Role-Taking, Role Standpoint, and Reference-Group Behavior*, [in:] *Role Theory: Concepts and Research*, eds. B. J. Biddle, E. J. Thomas, John Wiley & Sons, New York 1966, p. 151.

reciprocity did not mean symmetric relationships, quite the contrary. Mutual obligations arising from reciprocity could be different, indicating existing differences of the partners – their different locations in the social hierarchy¹⁴. Yet at the same time, the subject's ability to influence the relationship with others by creating a different image of himself in the eyes of the other made role modification possible. At a later stage, this would cause role modifications of both partners due to the dynamic of role reciprocity, as modifications would not only include an individual's role but also the kind of relationship between partners of the role, including its symmetry.

The conceptual framework of role theory contributes to the understanding of the kind of relationship Brazil is trying to construct in Africa. Main roles that can be identified are the roles of a donor and a recipient. Development cooperation was not the only element of the relationship that President Lula was willing to establish with African states, yet support for the continent's development lay at the core of Lula's speeches. However, the image of Brazil in Africa was constructed through stressing its distinctiveness from countries of the North – rich, developed nations, frequently with a colonial past, identified in the international aid architecture as “traditional donors”. If an image of Brazil visible in the official discourse of the Brazilian administration was to be determined, it was clearly that of Brazil as a non-donor. Emma Mawdsley identified four distinctive features describing the symbolic sphere of South-South development cooperation: the shared identity of a ‘developing country’, stressing mutual opportunity of cooperation, relevant, applicable development expertise and refusal of traditional, hierarchical donor-recipient relations¹⁵. These features can be detected in Brazil's discourse. Brazilian officials, referring to Brazil's own past both as a colony and aid recipient, try to unveil unequal relationships with developed countries, sending out a signal to its significant others that the perception and expectations towards Brazil should be different:

The relationship that Brazil pretends to maintain with African countries is not a relation of an imperialist state with vocation of hegemony. We are already tired, we have been colonized, we have freed ourselves from hegemony. What we want now is partnership¹⁶.

The term “development partner” is applied to Brazil and African states. Government representatives refuse to use the traditional expressions of “aid donor” and “aid recipient” for their paternalistic, neo-colonial connotations. It is stressed that Brazil enters in cooperation with partners that have an equal stand in the relationship – during a state visit to Mozambique, President Lula mentioned “We absolutely

¹⁴ A. Gouldner, *The norm of reciprocity: a preliminary statement*, [in:] *Role Theory: Concepts...*, pp. 142–143.

¹⁵ E. Mawdsley, *The changing geographies of foreign aid and development cooperation: contributions from gift theory*, “Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers”, April 2012, Vol. 37, Issue 2, p. 263.

¹⁶ *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at a dinner offered by President of Mozambique* [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [18.08.2015].

do not want to have supremacy over anyone. We want equality in our relations”¹⁷. Development cooperation researchers and policymakers acknowledge the challenge of categorizing states such as Brazil, India or South Korea, that are visibly distinct from traditional donors like the US, Netherlands or Japan. Despite existing divergence among these states, they mostly agree however, in applying the term “emerging donors” to a group of countries that are relatively new players, former recipients of aid, frequently being themselves developing countries, middle income countries or emerging economies¹⁸. The main reason which may explain Brazil's reluctance to use the term “emerging donor” and the quest to create an image of a partner focused on constructing a relationship of equality is the officials' awareness of the asymmetries underlying the development assistance regime.

The features of the donor-recipient relationship can be further clarified applying gift theory to its analysis. Tomohisa Hattori, relying on the anthropological theory of the gift, reconceptualises the institution of development assistance into an act of gift exchange, typical in indigenous cultures¹⁹. Gift theory allows to scrutinize the logic of reciprocity behind the relation between Brazil and African states, Brazil's significant others and the country's efforts to redefine the donor-recipient relationship. The anthropologist Marcel Mauss in his essay *The Gift* asserts that what is most important in the act of offering a gift is not the material value of the object, but the social obligation it creates. Mauss asserts that the gift is not free: it requires reciprocity. This obligation distinguishes the gift from other forms of social exchange. The act of giving creates a social relationship of inequality: as long as the recipient of the gift does not repay the donor by offering a gift in return, he risks losing his honour and prestige²⁰. Marshall Sahlins, who referred to gift theory in his studies on types of exchange, went even further, claiming that gift giving creates an unequal relationship between the superior and the inferior and that gift exchange was an expression of the distribution of power²¹. Therefore, the act of development assistance understood as the equivalent of the gift in contemporary international relations is one of maintaining relationships of power. This has been observed by Hattori, who mentions that the maintenance of *status quo* has been indicated as the principal aim when engaging in development assistance²². The asymmetry of the donor-recipient relation could only be reshaped by repaying the gift, an option that is not viable as in the international

¹⁷ Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at a visit to the Centre of Brazilian Studies [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [18.08.2015].

¹⁸ N. Woods, *Whose aid? Whose influence? China, emerging donors and the silent revolution in development assistance*, “International Affairs”, 2008, Vol. 84, No. 6, p. 1205.

¹⁹ T. Hattori, *The Moral Politics of Foreign Aid*, “Review of International Studies”, April 2003, Vol. 29, Issue 2, p. 232.

²⁰ M. Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies*, Routledge, London–New York 2002, p. 11.

²¹ M. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics*, Chicago 1972, pp. 169–171, 208.

²² T. Hattori, op. cit., pp. 233–234.

system providers of aid grants suspend indefinitely the obligation of repayment for the support received. Therefore contemporary donor states' development assistance activities may be understood as instruments for the construction and reproduction of hierarchies in which donors can offer gifts, maintain or even strengthen their position by suspending any obligation of the aid recipient to set up his debt²³.

Brazil's rejection of the donor-recipient dynamic becomes even more conspicuous when considering Silva's argument that the logic of gift giving is justified by the discourse of solidarity. The idea of solidarity with Africa is present in both President Lula da Silva's and Dilma Rousseff's discourses. Even though Brazilian leaders promote the concept of "solidarity diplomacy", they argue that solidarity with African states will allow to reshape the existing power relations²⁴. The way Brazil is trying to be perceived in Africa and establish its relation with the continent would therefore be contradictory to a donor's aims and activities.

According to Marcel Mauss, the obligation to repay comes from *hau*, the spirit of the thing that will haunt the individual who received the gift until the moment of repayment. If a gift is offered in return, the receiver recovers his honour. In São Tomé and Príncipe, the first African country visited in November 2003, President Lula made a statement he would repeat numerous times when travelling to Africa and discussing the question of cooperation: "this is the beginning of a repayment of the historic debt that Brazil has with Africa, that we will repay"²⁵. The Brazilian leader was placing Brazil in the position of a subject that has an obligation and owes Africa for the impact African slaves made on the construction of the Brazilian nation: its colour, cuisine, music and dance²⁶. This could be treated as a step the country's leaders are taking to come to terms with the difficult past of slave trade for "Brazil needs to meet Africa to meet itself"²⁷. Africa in this context would not be treated as an aid recipient entangled in an asymmetric relationship. In his official speeches President Lula stressed that Brazil is the partner with the burden of the gift received from the continent. Development cooperation is therefore the act of repayment and Africa is a partner that not only offered Brazil a gift in the past but still, as the Brazilian leadership asserts, has a lot to offer²⁸.

²³ K. Silva, *AID as gift: An initial approach*, "Mana", April 2008, Vol. 14, No. 1, p. 165.

²⁴ *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to the Nacional Assembly of Angola*, [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [19.08.2015].

²⁵ All citations translated by the author. *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the opening ceremony of the Brazilian Embassy in São Tomé e Príncipe* [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [19.08.2015].

²⁶ *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and President Omar Bongo* [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [19.08.2015].

²⁷ *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the National Assembly of Angola* [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [19.08.2015].

²⁸ *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at a meeting with the Brazilian community of Senegal* [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [20.08.2015].

The image of the continent created in Brazilian presidential speeches is a subject that has been invisible or silenced for centuries. References to African invisibility have been made on many occasions by President Lula. The continent's invisibility was contrasted with the visibility of Europe and the United States. In 2006 in Botswana President Lula declared that Brazil will never again look at the world without seeing Africa. Lula's successor was making similar comments, referring to the lack of Africa's own voice²⁹. During the speech delivered at the opening of the third Africa-South America Summit, President Dilma said: "The time has gone when we were part of a distant periphery, silent or silenced and problematic"³⁰. Referring to Africa as a silenced or invisible subject, Lula's and Dilma's speeches created the image of a postcolonial subject that has been muted and needs to regain its voice and visibility. The image of the weak African agent that existed on the international stage was a representation of the Other created by countries of the North or international organisations that were trying to influence development policies and deliver solutions for the global South on the basis of these representations. What the postcolonial subject should therefore do is to tell its own story: present a different, Southern perspective on world affairs. Brazilian leaders juxtaposed the image of a silenced and invisible continent that Africa had been in the past with the more assertive, fast growing and more stable Africa of the 21st century. African states were depicted as agents creating a continent which "is designing its proper destiny"³¹. It was stressed by President Lula in Mozambique in 2010 that development would not be possible without a country's ability to define and address its necessities³². Brazil was therefore showing an awareness of Africa's strengthened agency that came in line with the country's principle of demand-driven development cooperation as well as value sets and modalities of cooperation offered by Brazil. Brazilian policymakers were making an effort to stress that this was Brazil's way of perceiving the African continent.

Presenting a different image of the recipient affected also Brazil's expectations towards African states – as strengthened subjects, they were able to offer many opportunities to their South American partner. As Emma Mawdsley in her analysis on South-South development cooperation noticed:

²⁹ *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at a lunch offered by President Festus Mogae* [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [20.08.2015].

³⁰ *Remarks by President Dilma Rousseff at the opening ceremony of the 3rd Africa-South America Summit* [on-line:] <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/sala-de-imprensa/discursos-artigos-entrevistas-e-outras-comunicacoes/presidente-da-republica-federativa-do-brasil> [20.08.2015].

³¹ *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at a seminar "Democracy and development in Africa" in Burkina Faso* [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [21.08.2015].

³² *Remarks by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at a dinner offered by President Armando Guebuza* [on-line:] <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/ex-presidentes/luiz-inacio-lula-da-silva/discursos> [21.08.2015].

elite projections of national self-interest drive much of the decision-making about the provision of Southern development cooperation, including the choice of recipients, and its nature and conduct. This is not necessarily a problem – indeed, it can easily be construed as a strength of South-South development relations³³.

Yet, to what extent closer ties with Brazil may be beneficial in more substantial terms for African states should undoubtedly be the object of research interest in the upcoming years for analysts interested in the Brazilian development cooperation.

This paper has sought to analyse the Brazilian quest for a redefinition of the role of a donor and donor-recipient relation in order to engage in development cooperation with African states. Past experiences of being a recipient and Brazil's interpretation of existing donor imaginaries as superior, paternalistic, creating neo-colonial ties with inferior recipients lead to a refusal of taking the role of a donor and its modification. This required the expression, during state visits and multilateral summits, through official speeches and declarations, of an alternative image of a Southern development partner with a similar history, culture and even a shared, Southern identity. Redefining the donor-recipient relationship required also strengthening the African agency, achieved at the discursive level by stressing the impact of Africa's contribution to Brazilian culture as well as possible future benefits the continent could provide to its partner. Yet, efforts made during President Lula's government may be jeopardized by Brazil's current administration. Modifying images, expectations and patterns of relationships requires a long-standing effort if it is to convince significant others. Since 2011 and President Dilma in office however, the focus on Africa has been somewhat more blurry. If official declarations have remained in line with statements made by President Lula, the significantly smaller number of presidential visits to the continent³⁴, decreasing trade numbers³⁵ and budget of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency responsible for technical cooperation projects make it quite clear that for Dilma, Africa is not the same important partner it was for Lula. Maintaining a more stable relationship with Africa might be a core premise for deepening ties with the continent and creating a feeling of affinity. It would also be essential for the redefinition of the donor-recipient relationship, one of the most disputed, contested and criticized political relationships of contemporary times.

³³ E. Mawdsley, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

³⁴ As of August 2015, President Dilma made four visits to Africa.

³⁵ Brazil – Africa trade balance is available at the site of the Ministry of Development, Industry and Trade. See: Intercâmbio comercial brasileiro: Países e Blocos Econômicos [on-line:] <http://www.desenvolvimento.gov.br> [20.08.2015].

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ON-LINE RESOURCES

- <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov>–Library of the Brazilian Presidency, containing repositories of presidential official speeches.
- <http://www.itamaraty.gov.br> – Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, website contains a repository of official speeches of Dilma Rousseff.
- <http://www.desenvolvimento.gov.br> – Ministry of Development, Industry and Trade, containing trade balance statistics

SUMMARY

The paper seeks to analyse efforts undertaken by the Brazilian administration since 2003 to create a strengthened relationship with Africa with development cooperation at its core. It examines discursive strategies implemented by President Lula da Silva and, to a lesser extent, his successor President Dilma Rousseff, to reconceptualise the donor-recipient relationship ingrained in this kind of cooperation. Brazilian efforts to change existing imaginaries of paternalistic donors and submissive recipients engaged in a neo-colonial relationship to images of equal partners engaged in a mutually beneficiary relation will be analysed by applying the theoretical concept of role and gift theory to a content analysis of presidential speeches delivered during official visits to African states.